



Sluggish and Sweet, Stubborn and Special

Audrey F., Missouri

I feel a gentle tug at the hood of my jacket. Turning around, I come face to face with the culprit; a little grey Welsh pony gelding. His muddy hoof paws the ground, and his face looks at me, plaintively. I gaze into the mischievously sparking eyes, and suddenly, they become spinning whirlpools of memory. I can still see that day quite clearly. It was cold, windy, and very, very memorable.

“You’ll do just fine,” mom had said on that day, the day of my first horse show. I, on the other hand, had decided to face the facts that I would most likely end up in last place, both in the under saddle class, and the jumping. When the time came for the jumper class to start, I entered the ring with hundreds of butterflies fluttering agitatedly in my stomach. After checking my stirrup length, I mount my little grey pony. A glacial wind blew in my face and made me shiver. “And next up, we have Audrey, number 773 riding Tally Ho,” the announcer’s voice blared over the megaphone. My stomach turned queasily, and I could feel myself breaking into a cold sweat. “Stay calm and relax,” my trainer told me reassuringly. Calm? Relaxed? How can you accomplish that when you’re so panicked you can’t even think straight? Taking a deep breath, I squared my shoulders, surrendered myself and trotted into the ring. The dilemma of getting Tally Ho to canter had been nagging at my mind all day long. He’s an awesome pony, but ponies are generally lazy. I desperately attempted to urge him into a canter. Instead, he gave me that nippy little trot that always frustrated me during my lessons. Our approach was unorganized and our jump clumsy. He finally cantered afterwards but kept breaking into trot before each jump, no matter how hard I urged him. An icy blast thoroughly numbed my body. I kept asking myself, why in the world had I asked to ride this pony? All my hopes were lost like the passing wind, I would be getting last place. I was jolted from my morose reverie by the realization that I still had half the course left; there was still an opportunity to recover from my humiliating first half! After the final jump, I, quite relieved (and frozen from the cold), guided Tally in a courtesy circle and was finished. We received fourth place, which was not nearly as bad as last place. My worries were still not over; we still had the under saddle class to conquer. Trying to be confident, I entered the ring for the second time and spaced myself evenly apart from the other horses and riders in my division. I wanted badly to get first place but knew it to be virtually impossible. As I reached out to fondle Tally’s ivory mane, half of me was impatiently awaiting the beginning of the class, and the other half was dreading it with anguish. After ages of waiting, it started. The walk and trot were painless, and Tally appeared determined to amend his performance from the previous event. The

worst, I knew, was yet to come. It arrived much too soon for me. "Canter your horses," called the announcer. "Please, please, please," I wordlessly beseeched Tally to cooperate as I dug my outside heel into his furry side. Suddenly, wonder of all wonders, that sluggish pony began cantering! I was overjoyed, but I kept urging him on with my heels, lest he break into a trot. After what seemed like eternity, it was over; everyone walked their horses to the center for the ribbon presentation. "And in first place, we have number 773, Audrey riding Tally Ho!" Tally and I, in first place?! Dismounting, I hugged his furry body and kissed his soft nose. Tally had given me all that was expected of him and then some. As I left the show with my blue ribbon, I was blissful with joy and eternally grateful to Tally for giving me his all.

As the whirlpools cease their revolving dance, I come back to earth, and see those two coal-black eyes with their playful glint; I suddenly remember those carrots that haven't been gobbled yet. Sprinting to retrieve them, I know exactly to whom I'll give them: a special, cute, but sometimes-sluggish little pony, who helped me win a blue ribbon at my first show.